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CANADA AND THE WAR

CANADA'S SUPPORT OF THE ARMY OVERSEAS

BROADCAST

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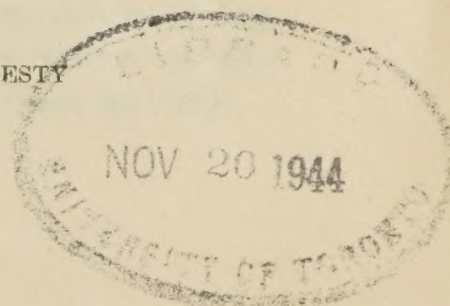
Right Hon. W. L. MACKENZIE KING, M.P.


Prime Minister of Canada

OTTAWA, NOVEMBER 8, 1944



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1944





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CANADA AND THE WAR

CANADA'S SUPPORT OF THE ARMY OVERSEAS

Broadcast by

Right Hon. W. L. MACKENZIE KING, M.P.

Prime Minister of Canada

Wednesday, November 8, 1944

I am going to speak to you tonight of Canada's support of our army overseas.

The government has been giving the closest attention to all the available facts. We have been examining the probabilities of the unknown future course of the war. We have been considering particularly the methods of supplying reinforcements required by the army. At the risk of increasing temporary anxiety we have taken the time needed to look at all the facts. In war time conditions change very rapidly. Five years' experience has taught us all that nothing is more uncertain than war.

I emphasize the question of reinforcements because no other question is more important to our fighting men. The government is fully aware of the public concern about reinforcements.

The Problem of Reinforcements as Related to Canada's Total Military Effort

Let me begin by placing the question in its true perspective in the picture of Canada's total military effort. Since 1939, nearly a million men have served in Canada's three armed forces. The present strength of the three services is about three-quarters of a million. All but 68,000 are volunteers. These figures represent a stupendous achievement in raising fighting men for a nation of less than twelve millions, particularly when account is taken of the manpower required for war production and vital civilian services.

The problem of reinforcements concerns only one of the three armed services. The navy and the air force have no such problem. The navy, with 85,000 men in the service, has reached the peak of its manpower needs. The air force, with 190,000 men in its ranks, has passed the peak of its manpower requirements. For that, we should all be thankful. The reason is that air force casualties, though costly, have been very much lighter than were anticipated.

The present strength of the army including the draftees is over 455,000 men. Of this number, about 390,000 are volunteers. Over 45,000 men have volunteered for general service since January 1st of the present year. Most of the men now in the army have been in its ranks for one, two, three or four years. All but recent recruits have received long, rigorous and varied training.

Concerning the Training of Reinforcements

It is against this background that we should examine the statement that reinforcements without adequate training are being sent into action. The Canadian army is a huge organization. At one time or another, more than 650,000 men have served in its ranks during this war. Of that great number a few may have failed to receive all the training prescribed. Competent officers have made the most careful review. They find that the number of these exceptional cases is exceedingly small. The highest military advisers of the government are satisfied that reinforcements sent into action have been well trained.

The record of Canada's army in Italy, France, Belgium and Holland is not the record of an army of which any part lacked adequate training. On the contrary, the military achievements of our army are the best possible evidence of the efficiency of its training. Since they went into action in July, 1943, our troops have received a steady stream of reinforcements to replace casualties. The recent victories on the Scheldt are the answer to those who say that, because of insufficiently trained reinforcements, the army is not being adequately supported.

The need for reinforcements is, of course, based upon the number of casualties. When we speak of the number of casualties, this does not mean the number killed. It means the number killed, wounded, missing and prisoners of war, and also those who because of sickness or other incapacity are not available for immediate combat.

The probable number of casualties has to be estimated in advance. Before D-Day, no one could possibly know how great the casualties would be in northwestern Europe. The military experts of all the forces which landed in France made the most

careful estimates of probable casualties. These estimates were based on experience in other theatres, on the probable nature of the operations in France and the Low Countries, and on the most careful appreciation of the strength of enemy resistance.

In the actual fighting, the total casualties in our army have not been as great as the number estimated and provided for. Infantry casualties were lower than expected in the actual landings and higher than estimated in the heavy fighting since the beachheads were established in June. The army has been obliged to transfer some of the men originally trained for other arms into the pool of infantry reinforcements. This procedure is known as "remustering". Such transfers are bound to be a disappointment for men who have been highly trained in a particular arm of the service and find themselves obliged, by the circumstances of war, to transfer to another arm. But such troops are not untrained. All "re-mustered" troops have had basic infantry training. In addition to basic training and the training they have received in their particular arm, they are given further specialized infantry training before being sent into combat.

Concerning the Reserve of Reinforcements

I now come to the question: Is there an adequate reserve of reinforcements for the army? In the opinion of the military authorities, no difficulty is likely to arise except in relation to reinforcements for the infantry. Infantry reinforcements have been adequate to meet requirements to date. But, during his recent visit to the army overseas, Colonel Ralston learned that to provide replacements for future casualties at present rates, the flow of infantry reinforcements from Canada should be accelerated. One fact needs to be emphasized. There is not an overall shortage of potential reinforcements. Many thousands of men are in training now and enlistments are continuing at an encouraging rate. Because we cannot tell how long the war may last, we must, as long as a possible need may arise, continue to recruit men for the army to keep up the supply of reinforcements. But recent recruits and those who enlist from now on will not be available until they are trained.

Colonel Ralston's report to the government disclosed an immediate problem which had to be faced. That problem is to find the means of speeding up the flow of fully trained infantry reinforcements to meet, not an actual shortage of reinforcements now, but a possible shortage in the next few months.

The question many of you will ask at once, is: why not send overseas some of the draftees who are fully trained in Canada under the National Resources Mobilization Act?

That will seem to many of you the easiest way of meeting the problem. It is not, however, in accord with the policy of keeping our army overseas a 100 per cent voluntary army if we possibly can. The voluntary system of raising our overseas forces has produced splendid results during five years of war. We have always believed that Canada's forces, having begun as voluntary forces, would be more effective, and that the country would be more united in their support, if we continued to rely upon the voluntary system for reinforcements as long as the voluntary system continued to be effective.

*Concerning the Change of Minister of the Department of
National Defence*

Colonel Ralston had grave doubts of our ability to keep up the flow of reinforcements in the next few months by voluntary means. He considered, therefore, that he had no alternative but to recommend that draftees should be sent overseas as reinforcements. The acceptance of this recommendation would have required agreement by the government that no alternative existed to a resort to conscription for overseas service. I do not need to stress the gravity of the decision the government was then obliged to face. Days of anxious deliberation were devoted to an exploration of all possible alternatives.

When I realized that unless Colonel Ralston's recommendation were accepted by the Cabinet, his resignation would follow, I felt it to be my duty, as Prime Minister, to seek the most expert advice I believed to be available. I accordingly consulted General McNaughton. As the builder and first Commander of the Canadian Army, no man, I knew, had the interests of the Army and the men overseas closer to his heart. General McNaughton expressed the belief that the possibilities of securing the required reinforcements by voluntary means had not been exhausted.

The recommendation made by Colonel Ralston was not accepted. Following his resignation, General McNaughton assumed the duties of Minister of National Defence.

I regret deeply the difference which led to Colonel Ralston's resignation. No man in Canada has given more selfless and devoted service to his country throughout the war. In this matter Colonel Ralston has followed the dictates of his conscience in what he feels he owes to his pledged word.

I need not give assurances of General McNaughton's devotion to his country, or of his determination to see that full support is given to the army.

It is important to remember that the former Minister of National Defence and the present Minister have precisely the same objective in view: they differ only as to the means of reaching that goal.

*Continuance of Voluntary Enlistment Preferable to Resort to
Conscription*

Let me give you some facts and figures which were before the government in reaching its decision.

There is a widespread impression that 60 or 70 or even 80 thousand draftees have been sitting around in military camps in Canada since 1941 or 1942 drawing good pay, and doing little or nothing to help win the war. That picture is almost totally incorrect. The facts are quite different.

In March, 1941, we began to call up men for compulsory service in Canada for the duration of the war. Up to September 30, 1944, the army had accepted about 150,000 draftees. The present total number of men enrolled as draftees is about 68,000. Of these some 9,000 are on extended leave, on compassionate or other grounds. Many of them are unsuited for military duties. Of the so-called "home defence" force the effective total strength, therefore, is under 60,000.

Here I pause to correct one widespread false impression about the draftees. Of the 60,000 only 23,000 are from the Province of Quebec, and only 25,000 from all Canada are French speaking.

You will ask what has happened to the other 82,000 draftees accepted by the Army since 1941. There has been a wastage of about 33,000 including men discharged for medical or other reasons which unfitted them to be soldiers. About 6,000 draftees have enlisted as volunteers in the Navy or the Air Force. The largest group, about 43,000 have enlisted as volunteers for General Service in the army. General Service includes service overseas. In the army overseas fighting today are many thousands of men who were once draftees.

The "home defence" army is not a static force. Its composition is constantly changing. This year, nearly 15,000 men have been called up and enrolled as draftees, and more than 10,000 draftees have volunteered for General Service. Since the landing in France in June voluntary enlistments for overseas from the "home defence" troops have been higher than the numbers called up and accepted as draftees.

From a purely military standpoint, there is no argument that it is preferable to reinforce a voluntary army with volunteers. The military authorities report that enlisting gives the draftees a new

outlook, new self-respect, and a determination that comes from having made a great decision. That is bound to make them better soldiers. This is very important, because we are as much concerned with the quality, as with the numbers, of men sent overseas as reinforcements.

We must remember that if draftees are sent overseas before they volunteer, they will not be going to reinforce an army of drafted men. Over and over again it has been said that conscripted men would be received without enthusiasm by the volunteers they were sent overseas to join. It is also said that the presence of conscripts would constitute a source of division, and possible dissension, in the fighting units. That is nevertheless a risk the government would have to take, if it were necessary to enable Canada to bear her just share of the load in the winning of the war.

*Concerning Numbers of Trained Men Available and Effect thereon
of Resort to Conscription*

But that is not the situation. There are some thousands of trained volunteers already overseas or about to be despatched overseas as reinforcements. Others are being re-mustered. There are, in addition, many thousands of volunteers in training in the army in Canada. Every day draftees are volunteering for overseas service. We believe their number can be increased by emphasizing anew the need and the opportunity for overseas service.

We had to ask ourselves one other question: How many additional men would be immediately available if compulsion were resorted to in order to send draftees overseas? I have told you that the present effective total of draftees in the army is under 60,000. Of that number only about 42,000 are considered suitable material for infantry reinforcements. Some 16,000 of these men are trained as infantry. It is estimated that about 8,000 of them are sufficiently trained so that they could be ready for combat at an early date.

Without any compulsion or any intensification of present methods a considerable number of these draftees would volunteer. We believe many more can be secured by a special appeal. The actual difference in numbers secured by the two methods might be very small indeed. The voluntary system has not broken down. At the moment, it is subject to an added strain which calls for an intensified effort at home, in the period immediately ahead, particularly to provide personnel in an advanced stage of training.

How great the difficulties would be in substituting conscription for overseas service for the voluntary system no one knows. But everyone who is honest with himself knows that there would be

genuine difficulties and that they might be very grave. Instead, we are redoubling our efforts to meet the existing situation by the voluntary method. In these efforts, I appeal for the patriotic co-operation of all Canadians.

*Concerning the Position of Men Drafted for National Service
in Canada*

Many of you will ask why, if they are not to be sent overseas, the draftees are not disbanded? There are several reasons. One is that ever since early in 1942 draftees have been enlisting and going overseas in thousands. Many more are trained, and will wish to volunteer for service overseas now that it is clear that the need for "home defence" has passed. Another reason is that while the war is not yet advanced to the stage where the government can announce a detailed plan of demobilization, it has been decided to follow the principle that those men who have given the longest and the hardest service will be given the first opportunity of demobilization. Obviously that means a first preference in discharge and in employment opportunities for those with overseas service.

But this does not mean that draftees will be maintained in idleness. As long as we have an army overseas, Canada remains the ultimate base of its operations. We must maintain a considerable military establishment for the training of reinforcements, the provision of supply and certain other non-operational duties. Military garrisons in Newfoundland and on the coasts cannot be entirely abandoned. Many of these duties can be and are being performed by volunteers who are not fit for combat service. Some of these duties will necessarily continue to be discharged by draftees.

While we prefer the voluntary system for overseas service, compulsion where necessary will continue to be used to ensure that fit men of military age perform national service required by our war effort. Draftees employed in national service will remain in the army under discipline at army rates of pay. Obviously, it would not be fair to allow draftees preferential treatment by giving them civilian work at civilian rates of pay.

Another reason why draftees, except those who for physical or other reasons have ceased to be useful as soldiers, should not be disbanded, is that so long as they are in the army and adequately trained, they will continue to be a potential ultimate reserve of reinforcements whose compulsory employment in any theatre may, in the light of developing circumstances, have to be reconsidered.

Means to be Employed to Increase the Flow of Infantry Reinforcements

To increase the flow of infantry reinforcements for the army we shall intensify our effort to encourage voluntary enlistment. The existing establishment of the army in Canada and in England will be reviewed with the object of freeing every volunteer who is fit for combat duty. We shall continue to draft men reaching military age for compulsory training and service.

We shall make every effort to have all draftees told individually of the need for their services. We shall also make every effort to have each draftee told individually of the practical benefits to his own future of becoming a volunteer and enjoying the full opportunities for successful re-establishment in civil life. In this we shall follow the principle set forth by General McNaughton: "You cannot drive men of spirit but you can encourage and lead them."

The glory of Canada's fight for freedom is the imperishable fact that every Canadian in uniform at sea, in the air and on every fighting front is there by his own choice. In this world conflict Canada has produced a race of noble warriors. The light in their eyes is the light of liberty, and the fire in their hearts is the fire of spirits dedicated to the service of their fellow-men.

This is not the hour to destroy that magnificent record. It is the hour to kindle the fire of free service in the hearts of all our young men, in the army and outside its ranks.

Appeal for Full Support to Canada's Army Overseas

I would ask my fellow Canadians, without distinction of race or creed or party to join with me in the appeal which I now make for full support to Canada's army overseas. I ask all to join no less unitedly than we have joined in the appeal for the Victory Loan. This is a higher call, and it should bring forth an even greater response.

No pride could be greater than our pride in what our armed forces are doing to help win the war, and to give Canada a foremost place among the free nations of the world.

The future of our country will belong to the men who are fighting Canada's battles today and to those men and women who are giving them full support. They will be the leaders of our country through years to come.

To you, young men, who are serving in Canada's "home defence" forces, I should like to make a special appeal. Because of the training you have already received, you are in an exceptional position

to give service which is particularly needed at this time. I have told you of the need. Let me emphasize the opportunity—the greatest you will ever have—to further serve your country and to bring honour to yourselves and your families. You will never regret the decision to do all you possibly can to support Canada's fighting army. In doing that, you will be helping to destroy the enemy of mankind and to provide security and opportunity for yourselves, your children and your fellow-men. You will be doing more than that. You will be helping to remove a source of misunderstanding, bitterness and division in our own country and to preserve its strength through years to come. You will be helping to lay the foundations of a better world.

A Victorious Canada, Free, United and Strong

I appeal no less earnestly to the friends and families of our young men to help and encourage them in a decision which will mean everything to them through the rest of their lives.

It is the government's responsibility to make the decision as to the best methods of supporting Canada's army overseas. No decision could possibly please everyone. We have made the decision which we believe will best support the army and contribute most effectively to an utmost national effort in the winning of the war. But to achieve these ends, we shall need the help and co-operation of the people as a whole. Partisan controversy and division at this time will weaken, not strengthen Canada's war effort. If we all do our part, Canada will emerge on the day of victory, free, united and strong. That is the Canada we want to welcome the return of our victorious fighting men.

A. J. Henry



A Victorious Canada Free, United and Strong

I appeal to you earnestly to the friends and families of our young men and women and encourage them to a decision which will mean everything to them through the rest of the war.

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It is the government's responsibility to make the best use of the resources of the country. We have made the decision which could make possible the victory. We have made the decision which we believe will best support the army and contribute most effectively to an ultimate national effort in the winning of the war. But to achieve these ends we shall need the help and co-operation of the people as a whole. Partisan controversy and division at this time will weaken, not strengthen Canada's war effort. If we all do our part Canada will emerge on the day of victory free, united and strong. That is the Canada we want to welcome the return of our victorious fighting men.